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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000899

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SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE ANTITERROR SUCCESSES CONTINUE

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Classified By: Amb. Kristie A. Kenney, reasons 1.4 b, d.

11. (C) SUMMARY: Philippine authorities, with U.S. assistance, arrested or killed eight significant terrorists since January. These operations demonstrated enhanced synergies between security and intelligence forces, increased sophistication, and effective avoidance of collateral damage. In recent arrests, suspected foreign terrorist financiers were among those detained and deported, possibly indicating a heightened interest in the Philippines by Middle Eastern operatives. The most prominent recent case, that of Bali bomber Dulmatin, who carries a ten million dollar Rewards for Justice reward, remains in limbo, as U.S. and Philippine authorities have been unable to obtain corroborating DNA samples from Indonesian counterparts. The improved coordination between law enforcement, military, and intelligence organizations has not only led to more effective operations, but also has provided greater security for civilians. END SUMMARY.

CONTINUED SUCCESS IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES

12. (C) Philippine military units conducted a raid on the southern Philippine island of Tawi-Tawi on January 31, resulting in the death of Abu Sayyaf Group sub-commander Wahab Opao (a.k.a. Abu Fatima), and allegedly the death of Jemaah Islamiyah leader and Bali bomber Amir Bin Usman (a.k.a. Dulmatin). Opao was a logistics specialist who had been involved in numerous terrorist operations in the Philippines, including bombings, kidnappings, and the murder of at least three individuals. U.S. and Philippine officials believe his death may have dealt a setback to Abu Sayyaf's operational ability.

13. (S) Separately, on February 17, a joint Philippine military operation hit the Jemaah Islamiyah network when authorities captured significant Indonesian terrorist Latif (a.k.a. Salman) near Davao in southeastern Mindanao. Latif is a known associate of wanted Jemaah Islamiyah Bali bomber Umar Patek and is thought to have been hiding in the Philippines for more than three years. In a coordinated and well-timed operation, Philippine military forces captured Latif after quickly reacting to a tip; significant evidence including computer equipment, mobile phones, weapons, explosives, and training manuals were found in his possession at the time of his arrest. Philippine authorities have been cooperative in sharing intelligence from debriefings of Latif, which have been productive and yielded insight into Jemaah Islamiyah activities.

IDENTITY OF REMAINS HINGES ON INDONESIAN COOPERATION

14. (C) Following the January 31 firefight on Tawi-Tawi, a Philippine informant led troops from the Philippine Marines and Military Intelligence Group to a grave on the island on February 18, where the informant claimed Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist leader Dulmatin was buried (reftel). Dulmatin is suspected of masterminding the 2002 bombings in Bali, Indonesia, that killed 202 people, including seven U.S. citizens. He is an electronics specialist with training by al-Qa'ida in Afghanistan and a senior member of the Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist organization, listed as wanted under the Rewards for Justice program for up to \$10 million. At the request of Philippine authorities, U.S. personnel are assisting in the investigation. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has completed their DNA testing of the cadaver samples, but cannot determine whether the remains are Dulmatin's without comparison to known DNA samples that are in the custody of the Indonesian government. Indonesian authorities have thus far refused U.S. and Philippine requests to release the samples for analysis, citing a preference to conduct their own tests. The FBI and Embassy Jakarta are seeking a compromise that would allow Indonesian specialists to monitor FBI comparison of the Indonesian and Philippine DNA samples.

QUICK ACTION IN POSSIBLE PLOT TO BOMB EMBASSIES

15. (C) The investigation by Philippine authorities of a
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potential plot to bomb multiple embassies in Manila and subsequent arrest of five suspects demonstrated the increasingly structured and disciplined interagency approach by the Philippine government towards counterterrorism operations. On February 27, Philippine National Police arrested Jordanian national and Saudi resident Khalil Hassan Al-Ali and Jordanian national and Philippine resident Walid Abd-al-Razzaq Husayn Salim Abu Ayshah for visa-related violations. Both individuals were financiers with suspected connections to the plot. Following interrogation, the Philippine government took immediate steps to deport the two suspects to Jordan.

16. (S) In a separate, but apparently related case, combined elements of the Philippine Army and Philippine National Police arrested Mohammad Macaraya Bani on March 8, 2008, in the resort of Boracay and Khalid Pagayao on April 8, 2008, in a suburb of Manila for their suspected involvement in the Manila plot. Bani is known to be associated with the Moro National Liberation Front, the Abu Sayyaf Group, and other foreign jihadists involved in terrorist financing schemes, while Pagayao is believed to be a Jemaah Islamiyah-trained bomb maker and had bomb-making materials in his possession when arrested. A fifth individual, Muhammad Amro, was arrested by Philippine National Police on March 20, 2008, for his suspected role in financing the Manila bomb plot. In all the arrests, Philippine military, police, and intelligence officials displayed cooperation that transcended historic interagency barriers that in the past would have hindered their ability to effectively pursue the suspected terrorists.

COMMENT

17. (C) While continuing to aggressively press the fight against terrorist groups throughout the country, Philippine authorities are cognizant of the need to take all possible precautions to avoid civilian casualties. A noteworthy example of this concern for non-combatant safety was evident during an April 6 operation on Jolo island in the Sulu

Archipelago, when Philippine National Police killed Abu Sayyaf Group/Rajah Solaiman Movement operative San Hassan Amdal during an early morning arrest attempt. When the police approached Amdal at his home in the middle of a remote village to serve an arrest warrant in the pre-dawn hours -- an operation fraught with potential hazards -- Amdal attempted to fire on the officers and was killed. Despite the proximity of other residents, the operation was conducted without any collateral casualties. As with the Manila bomb plot investigation, the high degree of cooperation between different Philippine military, police, and intelligence agencies contributed to the success of the operation. While historically not commonplace, these types of sophisticated, integrated operations are becoming more the norm rather than the exception in Philippine counterterrorism operations.

KENNEY